

*The Cincinnati Art Museum Bulletin*



## *SCULPTURE OF THE FAR EAST*

**H**istory sometimes moves by coincidence too broad for fiction. Otherwise it would be hard to explain that datable moment when a mature civilization lacking only the artistic resource of a monumental style was confronted by a mature religion peculiarly rich in sculptural possibilities. And it would seem much too contrived if such a meeting should instantly produce one of the world's great arts. Yet this is precisely what happened in the Vth century A.D. when the spring sun of Buddhism, coming slowly up from India, touched the plastic genius of China into sudden flower.

Buddhism had this generative effect wherever it went, which was throughout the most populous third of the globe. For about three hundred years after Gautama, a prince of the Sakya clan from the Himalayan foothills on the border of Nepal, had become the Buddha, the enlightened one, his following gathered strength until the Maurya king Asoka made Buddhism the



state religion of a realm more unified than any India was to know till the British came. This was in the IIIrd century before Christ, and pious legend counts more than 80,000 *stupas*, or temple mounds, Asoka raised over relics of the Buddha. Many of them were lavishly carved, but the Buddha himself was never depicted, being shown as a lotus, or column, or throne, or any of a number of symbols, until his teachings reached the Gandhara region of the Indus valley, the outermost fringe of the Hellenistic world. Here on the trade routes to Turkestan and China the Greek tradition was strong enough to clothe the Buddha in human form, aristocratic, mustached, with the *urna* or jewel of inner enlightenment on his forehead. His elaborate locks, possibly an Aryan caste mark, turned into the *usnisa* or double brain.

With this reinforcement, Greek culture's chief gift to the Orient and an important one for the art of sculpture, Buddhism took its leisurely way north and eastward from oasis to oasis along the silk routes of central Asia into northern China. It was also spreading south and east into Burma, the jungles of Cambodia, Siam and Java, each stage of its journey marked by huge temple mounds. One of the largest of these, Borobudur, rose in Java by the IXth century A.D. at the very time when Buddhism was being encumbered and gradually suppressed in the land of its birth.

The Xth and XIth centuries saw immense temple cities building in Indo-China; Angkor Vat and Angkor Thom are the best known. While the Cambodian culture they personify was entirely Buddhist in origin, it could not escape its jungle setting; its art thrives with a tropical luxuriance that can be well seen in the Museum's reddish sandstone head. The *usnisa* is a symbol of sublime wisdom as are the elongated earlobes. This idea, that large ears are a sign of superior understanding, had occurred to the Greeks, who never put it to artistic use, being more concerned with nature, perhaps, than art which is likely to be a matter of symbols rather than of resemblances. The features are composed to the meditative look of a *Dhyani* Buddha, the heavenly counterpart of a living saint. But for all its attempt at rapt withdrawal it breathes the sensual energy, almost the ferocity of a jungle king.

Such mutations were inevitable as Buddhism travelled from climate to climate. The most striking adaptation took place in China. Indian Buddhism had tended to stress retirement from the world to the spiritual reward of a *nirvana* free from the corruptions of matter. This was too passive an attitude for the vital Chinese. They quickly brought scholarship and good works to the aid of a Buddhist theology which was already able to add order and dignity to Taoism's nature worship and spiritual drive to the social code of Confucius.

Buddha, Cambodia,  
Xth-XIth century A.D.  
Reddish sandstone  
with traces of paint;  
Width 16" 40 cm.,  
Height, 19" 47.5 cm.;  
accessions number 1946.6



In this fashion Buddhism took its logical place beside China's earlier religions, animating them both.

And China was well prepared. The imperial Han Dynasty, 206 B.C. to 220 A.D., had heard the first rumors of Buddhism about the beginning of the Christian era. It was a great period in Chinese history, corresponding in time and influence to the Roman epoch in the west. The Han rulers were eager for new ideas, sending embassies to India, Arabia and the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, opening the silk routes, consolidating the earlier advances of Chinese civilization. To this day the Chinese call themselves "men of Han" in preference to the powerful but ruthless one-man Ch'in Dynasty, 221 to 206 B.C., which built the Great Wall, persecuted the scholars and unfortunately stamped its name on the consciousness of the outer world.

The Han period felt the scale of Chinese sculpture start to grow towards the monumental. To be sure, the older bronzes and jades are fine sculpture by any modern standard, virile in their abstract design, perfectly suited to their ritual purposes. But they are intimate in scale, the character of size, as well as in actual dimension. It is tempting, though dangerous, to wonder why the scale of an art changes. Perhaps the compact vigor of the Shang and Chou bronzes was more expressive of a still tribal, feudal society not unlike that of the contemporary city-states of Greece, and less useful to the imperial majesty of the Han dominion.

At any rate the Han emperors and nobles, as if a sense of their greatness had come to them, began to build large tombs, richly ornamented, guarded by sculptured animals and heraldic monsters. Few of these stone sculptures in the round have survived, but two groups of tombs in Shantung give a clear idea of Han style. The Museum's newly acquired relief, reproduced on the cover of this BULLETIN, comes from the later of the Shantung groups, Wu Liang Tz'u, the tombs of the Wu family near Chia Hsiang Hsien, dating about 147-149 A.D. At least its style is exactly that of the monuments still in place. The drawing, and the relief is hardly more than an engraved drawing, is brilliantly decorative, showing a state procession in chariots with outriders, bordered above by a frieze of engaging dragons who hold each other's tails. It has been cut to the thickness of a slab from a stone beam, and the flat engraved carving immediately suggests the possibility of printing. In fact, prints or rubbings were anciently made from many such low relief carvings,



especially from stelae with royal proclamations, and undoubtedly anticipated the Chinese invention of movable type.

The relief also implies an established society of courtly ceremonial, firmly grounded on the Confucian classics, which the Han Dynasty assuredly was. It did not end in anarchy or undue confusion; China simply relaxed from empire to the normal condition of Europe, strong regional states soon to be held in a framework of Buddhist culture reasonably similar to the monastic framework of early Christendom. It was the period of the Six Dynasties, the Northern and Southern Dynasties, an interim of spirited provincial competition till empire should resume with the T'ang Dynasty in 618. And its chief glory was Buddhist sculpture.

The spring pageant of Buddhism set in from the northwest with the Wei Dynasty. It would soon reach full season and through the cultural weather changes of a thousand years would never entirely fade. The Northern Wei, 386 to 589 A.D., came from Shansi, the northern province bordered on the west and south by the Yellow River on whose banks the first Chinese civilization had risen three thousand years before. They were a Tartar tribe, the Toba, who made Buddhism their state religion and by 495 had moved their capital to Lo-yang in Honan. Behind them in Shansi the cave temples of Yun Kang and T'ien Lung Shan swarmed with literally thousands of Buddhist carvings. Nearby in Honan, Lung Men added its tens of thousands, influenced by manuscripts and cult images out of India and central Asia, but in their profusion and maturity of style the most abrupt beginning known to any major art. Votive and memorial stelae sprang up overnight through the northern provinces, which from first to last were the productive area of China where sculpture was concerned. The Museum's stela is one of the earliest and finest of them.

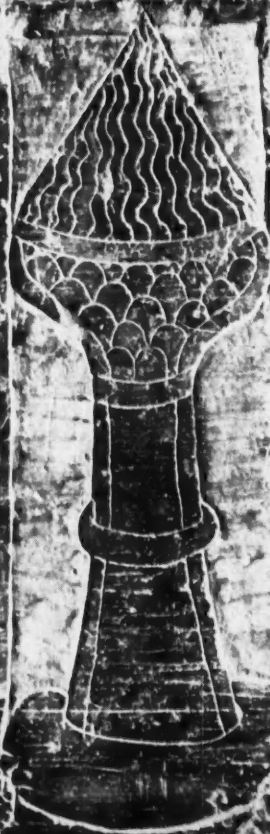
This "very important monument," as Siren calls it, bears an inscription with the date 522 A.D. It is carved from the dark gray and brittle limestone of Honan and weighs slightly over a ton. Heaviest of the Museum's sculptures, it has been the most often moved as the oriental collections have grown and demanded larger quarters. It may rest a while in the new hall of Chinese sculpture around which the other four Far Eastern galleries have been grouped. There is a quality of grandeur about it beyond its massive bulk, which may recall the rock cliffs from which the first Buddhist sculptures of China were hewn.

The subject is a typical one, cut in typical high relief: a *Sakyamuni* Buddha, the historic teacher, flanked by *Bodhisattvas*, saintly personages who have achieved *nirvana* but have chosen to remain in the world to help mankind.

*Opposite:*  
Wei Dynasty Stela



准那  
齊北太守尚雍



都准那  
上縣及縣令尚天標



陰陵縣令尚法德  
准那



都准那  
平陵令尚天賜



Votive stela with  
Buddhist trinity, Honan,  
Wei Dynasty,  
dated 522 A.D.  
Limestone;  
Width, 40" 100 cm.,  
Height, 79½" 198.75 cm.;  
accessions number 1946.11



They stand on lotus flowers and hold lotus buds. The Buddha is seated in the cross-legged position of *padmasana* on a lion throne, *simhasana*. His right hand makes the gesture of assurance, *abhaya mudra*, and his left hand is in the position of charity, *vara mudra*. These poses and attributes come from an exact language of symbols worked out over the centuries by Indian theologues and turned over ready-made to the Chinese artist. A pointed aureole, flickering with engraved flames along its edges, shapes the stone whose unsymmetrical contours hold to a living balance. A smaller engraved aureole surrounds the Buddha's head with the seven *manushi* or previous Buddhas. Around and above them *apsaras*, heavenly spirits, trail their draperies as they fly with crowns, incense-burners and other celestial symbols. On the base a procession of donors with umbrella-bearing attendants moves towards a central incense-burner; they parade in tiers on the back of the stela. Dragons, a panther leaping on a deer, the toad sign of the moon, the three-footed crow of the sun, children, acrobats and finally a *Maitreya* Buddha, a Buddha of the future, appear unexpectedly on the sides and back in vivid engraving. They play away from and turn back to the central trinity joining the serene formality of its features and the elegance of its formalized draperies to compile a near-encyclopedia of Wei sculpture. This Northern Wei style of the first half of the VIth century is sometimes called archaic, and if the word invokes the splendid formality of Greek *kouroi* in the VIth century B.C. it is justly used. There could be no higher praise.

The Northern Wei dissolved into a quick series of overlapping dynasties, Eastern and Western Wei, Northern Sung and Northern Ch'i, which makes the Wars of the Roses seem easy to follow. By 581, however, the great Duke of Sui took the throne and the imperial name of Wen Ti. In 589 he captured Nanking in the south and China was again unified. The Sui Dynasty, which yielded gracefully, as it did all things, to the T'ang in 618, was a true golden age for Buddhism. Wen Ti, according to usually reliable chronicles, ordered the building of 3,792 temples, the repairing of over a million images, which must include the smallest votive figures, and the making of 106,580 new ones. Out of the handful that have survived from this multitude the Museum is fortunate to own an acknowledged masterpiece.

It, too, is of gray limestone, still covered with a tawny paint and







*Bodhisattva: probably  
Kwanyin, Sui Dynasty,  
589-618 A.D.*

*Limestone with paint  
and gold;*

*Width, 13" 32.5 cm.,*

*Height, 33" 82.5 cm.;*

*accessions number 1950.72*



Horse: *Tomb figure,*  
*T'ang Dynasty,*  
*618-907 A.D.*  
*Pottery with colored glazes,*  
*predominantly blue.*  
*Width 22" 56 cm.,*  
*Height, 20 1/4" 51.5 cm.;*  
*accessions number 1950.49*

traces of gold. The elaborate headdress, never worn by the Buddha who scorned both luxury and asceticism, shows that it is a *Bodhisattva*, probably, judging from the leaf-shaped object held in the left hand, Kwanyin, the most popular of them all. Kwanyin is the Indian Avalokitesvara, always a figure of mercy and compassion. At this stage of development he is still a man though he has risen to a kind of neuter and wholly Buddhist superiority over the flesh. The Chinese, however, were persistent dualists, seeing the universe in terms of positive-and-negative, male-and-female. Soon they will identify Kwanyin with a south Chinese protectress of seafarers, making him over into a womanly agent of tenderness and intercession. By another historic coincidence this transfer will be complete at exactly the moment when the cult of the Virgin rises in the west.

Sui style acted as a bridge between the abstract vitality of the Wei and the more relaxed naturalism of the T'ang. It has the virtues of both, as the Museum's example witnesses. A certain look of metal about it also shows that stone was not the only sculptural medium; bronze, wood, ceramic figures must have been even more numerous, though more perishable. Some of its features such as the pierced silhouette of the sleeve draperies, the thin disk of the halo with its seven *manushi*, or past Buddhas, the jeweller's detail of the bead necklaces, seem to translate the lean grace of bronze into stone. And sometimes this mastery of materials can be the mark of a mature style, perfectly sure of what it wants to do and perfectly able to do it.

At the risk of drawing over-easy parallels, it could be said that T'ang sculpture corresponds to the art of Greece in the IVth century B.C., or to the XIIIth century in France, and that sculpture of the Sung Dynasty, 960 to 1279, tends to the same often florid and always dexterous mannerisms as did the late Hellenistic schools or the flamboyant Gothic. Something of the religious fervor which gave conviction to Wei and Sui sculpture had already gone from the T'ang in favor of a worldly elegance, which touched even the numberless pottery figurines that made up the tomb retinues of T'ang aristocrats. The Museum's blue-glazed horse is a distinguished and rare example.

The importance of its color suggests that painting was better suited than sculpture to the T'ang temperament; it was the major art of the Sung Dynasty, relegating sculpture to a secondary and decorative role. And due to painting's dominance sculpture came to rely on the pictorial effect of casual poses, linear contours and brightly painted surfaces. This is not ordinarily a healthy condition for sculpture, but not all the results, in the Sung period at least, are bad. The best can boast that separate life enjoyed by opera and ballet, which grows from a mingling of the arts, not







equal to the sum of both, but something new, and perhaps equal to at least one of its components. So it is with the Museum's new wooden and polychromed Kwanyin.

There was a religious revival in the XIIth century which produced quantities of similar figures, especially in the northern provinces of Shansi and Hopei. Most of them are Kwanyins, seated in the position of royal ease, *maharajalila*, with an arm resting negligently on a raised knee. They were repeated endlessly in later periods, mirroring at last the decay of even craft taste which was a universal symptom of the industrial XIXth century. Ceremonial repaintings at the end of religious cycles overlie much of the original color, and most of them, regardless of period, belong in spirit to the era of the "China trade" when Chinese taste, as well as western taste in things Chinese, esteemed craft ingenuity more than the weightier matters of form and feeling. But the more rules the more exceptions to the rules, and the Museum's Kwanyin in its richness and delicacy is a heartening evidence of the survival power of a great art.

P. R. A.

Kwanyin: *Shansi or Hopei, Sung Dynasty, 960-1279 A.D.*

Wood with paint;

Width 38½" 96.25 cm.,

Height 38½" 96.25 cm.;

accessions number 1950.73

The Wei stela is published and reproduced by Martha Davidson in "Great Chinese Sculptures in America," *Art News Annual*, 1939, and in "An Exhibition of Chinese Stone Sculptures," C. T. Loo and Co., New York, 1940, with an introduction by Alfred Salmony. The Sui Bodhisattva is published by Osvald Sirén in his indispensable "Chinese Sculpture," London, 1925, volume I, page 83, and volume III, plate 308. A companion to the Museum's sculpture is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. Sirén has been used extensively, as has Alan Priest's "Chinese Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," New York, 1943, especially his chronology. Numerous other works have been consulted, including Sir Charles Eliot's classic "Hinduism and Buddhism," London, 1921, in three volumes, and A. K. Reischauer's "Studies in Japanese Buddhism," New York, 1917. Verbal comments by Sirén and Reischauer have been most useful. All authorities, however, are absolved from the many sweeping generalizations and parallels drawn here.

## DEAN APPOINTED

The appointment of Herbert P. Barnett, who has been head of the School of the Worcester Art Museum for the past 11 years, as Dean of the Art Academy of Cincinnati was announced by the President and Trustees of the Cincinnati Museum Association. Mr. Barnett is to assume his duties with the opening of the fall term in September.

Born in Providence, R. I., in 1910, Mr. Barnett attended the Rhode Island School of Design and later was graduated from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He studied for three years in Europe and from 1932 to 1940 taught privately in the Gloucester Art Colony.

He was 17 when he had his first one-man show at the Grace Horne Galleries in Boston. Since that time he has had more than 25 one-man exhibitions, eight of them in Museums. He has exhibited at Symphony Hall, Boston, the Nashua, N. H., Public Library; Marie Harriman Gallery, Contemporary Arts Inc., and Mortimer Levitt Gallery, all in New York; Worcester Art Museum, Philadelphia Art Museum, and Robert Hull Fleming Museum in Burlington, Vermont. He has contributed paintings to many national exhibitions and is represented in the permanent collections of several leading museums.

During the summer of 1943 Mr. Barnett was instructor in painting at the University of Vermont. He was instructor in painting and a lecturer at the Norfolk School of Yale University during the 1948 season, and was its director in 1949. In Worcester Mr. Barnett also developed an affiliation of the Museum's Art school with Clark University. This varied background gives Mr. Barnett an unusually broad grasp of the varied problems of education in the arts. The Museum Association welcomes Mr. Barnett and his family to Cincinnati.

### NEW SERIES, VOLUME 1, NUMBERS 5 & 6, SUMMER, 1951

On the cover for this issue are reproduced two details of a stone beam from a tomb, possibly the Wu Liang Tz'u group in Shantung; 147-149 A.D. Width, 65" 162.5 cm., Height 18" 45 cm.; accessions number 1950.74. All photographs by Richard Mathers, with the exception of those for the cover and page six and eleven. Design and typography by Noel Martin, engravings by Art Crafts Engraving Company, letterpress by S. Rosenthal & Company, Inc.

## THE CINCINNATI MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

### *The Trustees:*

CHARLES J. LIVINGOOD, *Honorary President*

JOHN J. EMERY, *President*

JOHN W. WARRINGTON, *Vice President*

ALBERT P. STRIETMANN, *Treasurer*

THOMAS C. ADLER

JOHN W. BECKER

ALBERT D. CASH

WILLIAM HAYDEN CHATFIELD

E. W. EDWARDS

NELSON GLUECK

JOSEPH S. GRAYDON

JOHN B. HOLLISTER

BAYARD L. KILGOUR, JR.

RICHARD K. LE BLOND

HARRY S. LEYMAN

GEORGE A. RENTSCHLER

WILLIAM T. SEMPLÉ

CHARLES F. WILLIAMS

HARRY F. WOODS, *Emeritus*

### *The Staff:*

PHILIP R. ADAMS, *Director*

MISS MADGE A. SMITH, *Secretary to the Director*

NOEL MARTIN, *Assistant to the Director*

EDWARD H. DWIGHT, *Assistant Curator*

GUSTAVE VON GROSCHWITZ, *Curator of Prints*

MISS MARIE BLATHERWICK, *Registrar*

MISS MARY MINOT REED, *Librarian*

CHARLES B. SAND, *Business Manager*

MISS ESTHER KOPS, *Clerk*

PAUL NAISH, *Head of Education Department*

JOHN FAYEN, *Education Department*

MISS CHRISTINE MARTING, *Public Relations and Membership*

MRS. HARDING CHAMBERLAIN, *Membership*

MISS VIRGINIA CAMPBELL, *Secretary*

MRS. LOUISE SCHELL, *Switchboard*

MRS. MALTA ADKINS, *Cafeteria Manager*

JOHN F. JACKSON, *Building Superintendent*

EDWARD J. HAAS, *Assistant Superintendent*

IRVIN BACON, *Printer*

WM. HARRY GOTHARD, *Restorer*

*The Art Museum is one of the four institutions participating in the United Fine Arts Fund which ensures the continuity of the arts in Cincinnati.*



